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BY HUBERT CREEKMORE

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POETRY

PERSONAL SUN (1940)

THE STONE ANTS (1943)

FORMULA

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FICTION

THE FINGERS OF NIGHT

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THE LONG  
REPRIEVE

and

OTHER POEMS FROM  
NEW CALEDONIA

*A New Directions Book*

BY

HUBERT CREEKMORE

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Kanaka words in French orthography

*ouanith*—a meal

*dinanoua*—an evil spirit

*plou-plou*—a feast with dancing

*sagies*—spears

*tribu*—a village

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## Introduction

It is good that Hubert Creekmore's war poems were not published during the war. If his superior officers in the Navy had taken the trouble to read them carefully, the ideas might have gotten him in a lot of trouble. And if the daily reviewers had gone to the same pains—an assumption almost as fanciful—the first mature expression of this fine craftsman would in all likelihood have been discussed in terms of its subject-matter alone.

For it would be a mistake to evaluate this book either entirely on the basis of its principal "subject" (the war) or of its exotic locale—an American base in French New Caledonia. Both are important, to be sure. Creekmore's immersion in soldiering and proximity to battle provided him for the first time with a large human theme. The tragedy he participated in was prodigious enough at once to lift him out of the arid objectivism of *The Stone Ants* (1943), and to call forth that discerning sympathy for the dispossessed which was the virtue of his first novel, *The Fingers of Night* (1946). At the same time the extravagant vegetation and magical simplicity of his tropic island elicited a richness of word and image that was lacking in either the early poems or the novel.

Considered solely as a "war poet" Creekmore at first reading seems to fit neatly into the tradition of irony that has informed most of the best poetry of the day—the earlier (and stronger) Eliot and Auden; Cummings and Stevens, Shapiro and Lowell. One has come to expect the bitter contrast of war's stated ideals and its means, the reduction of slogans to reality:

". . . Here is  
All of war, compact.  
It is simple. It is death-fear."

or

"Fear is why we fought and what we found."

One has come to expect also the contempt for the non-fighting brass, the spectacle of racial arrogance whetting its prejudices in the very act of exterminating the racially arrogant, the cartoon of the love-starved GI (a favorite Creekmere character) on a wholly frivolous sexual debauch. But there is a new note even here: the impersonal *terza-rima* dignity of "Music in the Rec Hut," the sympathetic identification of "Letters Home," the reluctant affirmation of "Garden of War":

Here men have lost already all beside  
The eyes of some unchosen friend, but surely  
Even this parasite is greater than flower fire.

Like the early work of Hart Crane which it resembles—curiously, even in titles—but which it does not appear to stem from, Creekmere's poetry is ambitious. There is the same concentration of language and strain of vision, the same effort to integrate past and present, legend and science, night and day. Pound's documentary technique (Creekmere's postgraduate work included an analysis of the metrics of the *Cantos*) may be felt in such poems as "The Log of Memory" and there is a suggestion of Rimbaud's savage derangement in "Outdoor Movie—Nouméa," but the end product—more harshly woven, and at the same time more mature in its humility—is like neither.

Harshness—a density of meaning, an eccentricity of syntax, over-intellectualized imagery and insufficiency of music in the less successful poems—is the price Creekmere is paying at this point for his ambition. In common with most serious poets today, his work suffers from fear of writing an unconcentrated line. The meaning of "The Long Reprieve" is submerged in its mood; yet the poem is just explicit enough to fail as an abstraction. "The Red Ouainth" vacillates between magic and footnotes. Phrases like "our holothurian state" and "her pantheogonic womb" reveal the intellect at work on a level closer to the dictionary than

finished poetry permits. At the other extreme—"the incidence of heroes has a definite relation to accidents"—rhythm gives way wholly to statement of fact, and the result is prose.

Creekmore himself is impatient with people to whom "music" in poetry means rhyme and a regular beat. "They do not realize," he says, "that in music the beat is *beneath* the tune—a pulse, forcible or unemphatic, or a time-duration, as required. An even balance of syllables and stress pattern gives monotony, rather than music, although it is usually considered music." His own prosody relies rather on variations within a continuous, fairly even beat—achieved by adding to or reducing the number of syllables in each foot, and by the use of light syllables on stresses, or heavier syllables on unstressed beats. He prefers to consider the stress pattern and fit the words into it "so that they sound like a kind of speech (not necessarily speech of the 'common man,' either), giving rhythmic variety and pauses where possible or where desired." This, together with the use of lines of varied length tends to give his poems an effect of syncopation or counterposed rhythms such as music produces in a 3/4 beat under a 4/4 melody.

Rhyme itself is to Creekmore less an attribute of verbal music than an aural method of indicating rhythmic structure. In his first printed book, *Personal Sun*, he experimented with "analyzed rhyme"—cross-rhyming of vowels and final consonants, as in

noon	mine	hide	dying
cool	mile	strayed	displaying

But as he worked toward the greater condensation of the present volume, avoiding the colloquial deliberately, a still more complex scheme evolved. Perhaps to echo the crossed lives of the Negro and white soldier in the powerful "It's Me, Oh Lord," the rhymes (or assonances) criss-cross:

clod-veined	freed- -om
✕	✕
drained blood	long breed

and although here the rhyme itself may escape notice entirely, the pull of the two stresses can unquestionably be felt when the poem is read aloud.

It is fitting to talk about technique a little ponderously in connection with this book, because one may assume that in Creekmore's next the machinery will be so mastered that critics will remark the facility with which difficult material is treated in a fresh way. I have done so here only to emphasize that this poet has not been satisfied to lean upon any of the fashionable pillars, and to suggest (however inadequately) the seriousness of effort and the subtlety of craftsmanship that lie behind even such apparently effortless successes as "Countryside," "Where No Bombs Fell," "Garden of War" and "Night at Sea."

*Selden Rodman*

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THE LONG REPRIEVE  
AND OTHER POEMS FROM  
NEW CALEDONIA

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## I

... long ago, long ago  
*Before the great, great cyclone came, before*  
*The times that any man remembered . . .*



# EARLY TOPOGRAPHY

Octopus of vegetation dreams  
In valleys, reaching up the trickling seams  
Between the scrubby brown of mountain folds  
Its tentacles of greenery, and molds  
The watershed as on a colored map.  
Heavy clouds thrash in the upreared trap  
Of peaks, and drain their substance down the veins,  
Down the bouncing streams, until moraines  
Of tangled mangrove mix it in the sea.  
Upon the dry hills, tufted tan, debris  
From old geologies outlines the ghost-  
White trunks of niaouli trees. No blooded host  
Except the birds to greet the first brown chief—  
Kagou, earthbound and barking, and hopping leaf  
Of white-eye on the branches. Silent, threaded  
Down the distant canyons, like imbedded  
Alabaster on the steepness, falls  
The slender water over the broken walls.  
Obelisks of kaori pierce the waving  
Roof of tenements of trees, enslaving  
In their dark chambers the jungle of death,  
Hushed with the hum of dream life, its breath.  
Impossible leaves and vampire vines and blooms  
Like yellow caterpillars. Green hair plumes  
The lowest limbs. Green daggers twist, upturn  
On soaking stones. Green asterisk, tree fern,  
Footnotes the sky, a word of helpless gleams  
To hungry jungle dreaming, jungle of dreams.

# THE RED OUAINTH

And then more moons passed, more moons than there are stars,  
Days before the great, great cyclone came.  
And taro grew, ignames fattened in the earth  
And the coral-bottomed sea held up bright fish  
To flash before the spear point.  
And shell hillocks rose along the shore  
Beside the banyans. Men told sometimes  
A tale of long ago, long ago  
Before the great, great cyclone came, before  
The times that any man remembered,  
A tale the dhianoua, met at night along the pathway,  
Whispered in the ear.  
Long ago they ate men. And more moons passed  
Than there are stars.

... were times of the Great Hunger, other times  
Of the Great Anger ...  
When the fields withered and the roots shriveled,  
And the shriveled breast would give no milk.  
A time when fish caused death because of the flower  
Of the coral in its tissues.  
... were times when the dhianoua whispered, Long ago ...  
And the hunger stirred at the silent tale no father's  
Father could remember.

... a year of harvests and Techéa sat beneath the kaori tree,  
Black with pride, moon-flecked.  
Whispered in his ear and swimming in his body  
Like a sea-moccasin, the tale untold

That flowed in the cord  
From the time before the time of the great cyclone,  
Promised rich gifts.  
In battle, the valor of the dead descended  
With the eaten fertile parts into the eater.  
In the day that you eat of human flesh, dhianoua murmuring,  
Then your strength shall be doubled, and you shall be  
As a god, and wise and strong.  
A year of harvests and there was a pilou-pilou  
Where the Diahot flows into the sea  
At the foot of Mount d'Arama.

Then the dance commenced, and Kaméa dancing, wore the flowers  
Techéa's brother had thrown. Kéron, whose fruit he stole  
When they were children, Kéron dancing and Kaméa,  
And Kéron's comb in her hair.  
Two bamboo combs and flowers thrown at her brown feet  
And she had picked up one.  
. . . danced the pilou-pilou, old man of the tribe  
Murmuring, "Take your sagies," old man no one heeded.  
They left their spears and the old man's murmur  
To dance by the river at Mount d'Arama.

Techéa, leaning his ear to the dhianoua,  
White and water-clear in the moon fall,  
Felt the light leap up from the spirit lips  
. . . Long ago, a tale . . . and called his men.  
And when the dance was circling, Techéa  
Rose up against his brother Kéron  
And killed him, bird-beak of his club buried  
In the bloody chest.  
One by one the clubs fell till the dancing circle  
Shivered on the dust and ringed the fires with death.  
None but the old were left, the old who saw the fish

On banana leaves by the roasting pits of rock  
Give place to warmer flesh, a new pilou-pilou.  
They stuffed their throats with earth to smother:  
Man had drunk man's blood; his hunger cried for more.

. . . dawned white over the blood-soaked bush, morning  
Of clouds like a hundred cowri shells in the sky.  
Half forgot, a tale of long ago,  
All forgot, the dhianoua  
Sang its hunger where men slept with no fires  
In the night and much anger. Dhianoua  
Never died; nor did the dawn.

. . . Dawn

Of cowri shells, long ago . . . tomorrow.

# A L I K I

Against the morning sea, sea swelling in like mobile volutes of a  
shell,

He stands, almost another trunk under the dark vault of banyan,  
dark

By water-pearl in dawnlight: black aristocrat, warrior, bound in  
spell

Induced by tribal faith, projected from his lineage to live in stark  
And dread honor, hermit with the dead in custody, material  
And active death, solitary in the tangle of his ethnic park.

For touching him (in youth so often sweetly touched) or resting  
in his sight

(That once was met with brimming eyes) is current blasphemy,  
and those who do

Must be his ward. The foulness of their bodies, severed from the  
clean, unites

Society with last corruption in the burial tree. The head askew  
Upon a branch, fleshy novice by the calcic skulls in silent rite  
Of seaward stare, must exorcise its vagrant soul against return  
to view.

Through fern before the *tribu*, paspalum that molds the seaward  
hills, and past

The tendrilled vestibule into the shrine, a girl brings roasted  
meats and fruit.

Beyond the tribute stone and food, her eyes are snared (like  
frightened birds aghast

In acquiescence) by the sunless tapestry of skulls and rampant  
roots,



And living vessel of the god of death, Alikì. Then he feels at last  
The breath of life and turns, and she must close her brimming  
eyes against pursuit.

Her beating feet, up the hillsides, echo ancient rivers of belief,  
Echo heart's annunciation falling shell-like through the floating  
course,  
Falling to the certain bed of rest and love and death. In a brief  
Surrender hid her permanent union with his domain: fragile in-  
tercourse,  
Intangible, until that day when life will go; or quicker in her  
grief,  
She winds her arms upon him, active once before the toll of tabu's  
force.

And yet her penance, dreams Alikì, will make of her his bride,  
earthly womb  
In passive tactile marriage, tapestry across the banyan's vaulted  
gloom.

# THE *L*OG OF MEMORY

## I

... rose

as rose the lemon sun  
from eastern waters

the bud of brown mountains. . . .

At eight o'clock,  
as we were steering to the south,  
land was discovered bearing south southwest.  
Colnett, midshipman, pointed it out,  
dipping and swelling slowly  
with every lunge of the decks,  
and Captain Cook wrote it in the log  
under September 4, 1774:

“in the latitude of  $19^{\circ} 49'$ ,  
longitude  $164^{\circ} 53'$ .”

Offshore that afternoon, becalmed,  
locked out by the long, uncharted reef . . .  
And three canoes under sail,  
standing out to sea; but the sun  
sank, and they struck sail and vanished,  
and the unknown night  
rocked on the flashing sea.

... eclipse of the sun drawing on,  
and the Captain wanted to land for readings,

and two boats sounded the channel,  
    when all that morning  
    from different parts  
the sailing canoes of natives gathered.  
    . . . the people civil and obliging:  
gave our officer some fish;  
and, in return, he presented them with medals.  
The channel, he said, had sixteen and fourteen  
fathoms water, a fine sandy bottom.  
And the *Resolution* entered the gap in the reef  
    and anchored.

## II

. . . swarming canoes, the natives naked  
but for a cloth or leaf between the thighs;  
    few bearing weapons:  
and we lured them with presents lowered on ropes  
and two ventured on board the ship.  
Then others came and offered  
    fish that stunk intolerably,  
and several sat to dinner with the Captain.  
But pea-soup, salted beef and pork  
they had no curiosity to taste.

dogs and cats, leaping and creeping  
about the decks, and hogs and goats,  
    impounded at the stern,  
    aroused their admiration,  
awed their eyes, and they whispered and chattered.  
Ghosts, the animals might have been, of dead  
    ancestors,  
for all we knew, knowing not their language;  
and we, perhaps, were spirits too,

to judge their shy respect,  
returned from the isles of paradise.  
And so we gave them spike nails  
which they fancied, and red cloth.

. . . received our Captain with great courtesy  
ashore, and no signs of malicious intent.  
Teeabooma, being their chief,  
spoke a welcome to surge of murmuring syllables  
from the population;  
and here was fresh water, and here plantains,  
and here sugar cane and yam fields;  
and Captain heard the crowing of cocks,  
but saw none.  
Mr. Forster shot a duck flying overhead.  
Well, these men had never seen a gun—  
you can imagine. . . .

Next day about one P. M. the eclipse  
came on and they observed it from the offshore  
island called by the natives Balabea.

### III

“About seven o’clock this evening,  
died Simon Monk, our butcher,  
a man much esteemed in the ship;  
his death being occasioned by a fall  
down the fore-hatchway the preceding night.”

. . . sick of tasting a strange sun-fish  
bought of a native spearer  
were our Captain and two officers;  
and a pig died of eating the entrails.

## IV

Civilities (we hoped they were)  
continued: Captain brought a  
red and white dog and a red bitch  
to Teeabooma.

Mr. Forster went out botanizing  
in the gray and white forests  
and in the green jungle strips.

And on the 12th, Captain left  
a sow and a boar with the chief  
and explained in gesture  
the virtues of porcine fertility.  
The compliment was returned in six yams.

. . . on a large tree by the beach  
cut our ship's name and the date,  
took leave of the natives  
and put to sea in the morning,  
sailing down the coast . . .

found the Isle of Pines  
at the lower tip of the great island.  
Storm threatened, the season  
of cyclones on us, and our supplies  
were low and repairs needed.  
"Thus I am obliged," Captain told us,  
"first time in my voyages,  
to leave a coast I have discovered,  
before it is fully explored."

He called it New Caledonia.

## "MUSIQUE DE LA TRANSPORTATION"

Clockwise and counter the circles revolved  
Round the kiosk in the park,  
Wheeling of human roulette; for the plague  
Scarcely had lifted and still might strike  
Although the rats had been burned.

Uniforms, medals and braid were gleaming,  
Ranged on conservative benches,  
Scanning the rings of Kanakas and Japs  
And Javanese strolling beneath the trees—  
Formality blinking at brilliance.

Then came the orchestra, twenty-five convicts  
Filing in gray to the platform.  
Music began, musicians unbarred,  
"Intermezzo"—while the sarongs and Mother  
Hubbards swayed from the hips.

The English traveler, dined at the *Cercle*,  
Sat in amazement, muttered:  
Pitazy, that conductor, jealously fed  
His wife on the heart of an innocent friend.  
(Rest, oh Procne, he lied.

Chameleon crime with a finger touch  
Changes its color, is relative  
To every person, idea and moral,  
Since these are so various, in our various  
Disjointed world, and unknown.)

"How can you have," he inquired of the girl,

"This assortment of villany, death  
And rapine entertain you with concerts at night?"

"M. Griffiths," she said, "*nous écoutons*

*A la musique, pas au crime.*"

Aghast in his guilt at the tender souls

Of criminals, horrified

At the shaken dogmas of man and of sin,

The forgotten traveler sailed. And sailed

Before his day two convicts:

And we remember them—Rochefort

And Louise Michel, imprisoned,

Because of the music they felt, by men

Who jumped in the dance of vice—remember,

While American bands play today.

## II

*Now, in a foreign land,  
The fighter wends in words the ties  
That wrote the meaning of his life . . .*





# N O U M E A M O R N I N G

. . . emerge like stately butterflies from gates  
Drenched in bougainvillea, purple waterfall,  
From shuttered doors where every shuttered window  
Keeps night evils from the house, parades  
Of Javanese *bajous* to the market stall

Emerge with flutter of sarong, design  
Of bias tendrils to waver every slippered tread,  
Float between the pink and yellow houses,  
Corrugated roofs peeling red,  
Beneath tree-crotches smothered by the giant vine

Philodendron, beside a blood-leafed hedge,  
Promiscuous hibiscus, and the creamy stars  
Of night-washed frangipani, float and waver  
Deepening in the sun . . . by shady wedge  
Triangling streets, with lint-littered *arbres noires*,

*Place du Marché* usurped by a soldier canteen  
And grind of military trucks on every side  
Like chains in fiendish gear . . . to some other  
Market now, by boats on a silver tide,  
For string-hung goggling fish of silver and rose patine.

. . . returning, meet, as down the hills, below  
The clustered burning bells of *pomelel canaque*,  
Along ravines with watered ribs greening,  
Medusa of cactus on the lava brow,  
Come the children in khaki shorts and flowered frocks,

Toward *l'Ecole Communale*, to school,  
Meet and pass, mingling—swinging books criss-cross  
The flapping fish—mix and part. The pupils  
Rank before the meager building, pause  
In young salute, Tricolor up the limited pole

And qualifying banner of Lorraine.  
Upsurge of business comes, bicycles that converge  
Along the brown belt of trucks—merchant,  
Clerk and typist by the open drain,  
Wheeling to the worker's clock, in silence emerge. . . .

# L E T T E R S   H O M E

*They speak French here, so I can't talk to anyone . . .  
... no big trees, just some scrub they call neeooleys . . .*

## I

Now, in a foreign land,  
The fighter winds in words the ties  
That wrote the meaning of his life,  
Enriching it, so he presumed,  
With attitudes he cannot spell.  
Emotions suicide by magic  
When they face a verbal system.

Jute twines with the blossoms bloomed  
In artificial tanks of home, whose  
Affections yearn in movie guise,  
To vitaminize the lean feelings  
With a letter. Yes; he "takes his pen in hand";

But what can he say who never felt anything to say?  
Or he who never had to make the words to say it?  
A middleman had always handled their expression—  
    The grower of Mother's Day flowers,  
    The sewer of Father's Day ties,  
    The odor of Christmas perfumes,  
    The chromo of greeting card verse.  
And so these thousands of letters  
Shuttle between the inarticulate  
Outposts of war and well-swept firesides—

Procession of dried and inky characters  
Epic in its pathos.

The shoulders shadow paper  
Chaste for warm confession;  
The pen props in the fingers,  
Ink awaits the art.  
But grinding thought unshapes in arctic words  
The love that tenderly should burst,  
Visibly, achingly, like the cereus  
Spreading its cloud on rose-stained wall.

Our faith redeems our failure:  
We have embraced the rite,  
Stayed unfamiliar to its spirit.

## II

Footnotes to economics *I enclose*  
*two dollars or no pay since San Francisco*  
*and I need some shaving cream, so please*  
*send me a dollar if you can spare it.*

Statistics have not placed these in a context with  
*afraid you're stepping out with other men . . .*  
*I'm sending you my pay, not playing around*  
*and you better stay true to me. Do you*  
*go out with them? Is Buck hanging around?*  
*Do you—?*

Acid in the arteries. And heart acidified:  
"Boy-does-he-know-how-to-handle-women!"  
Mails a brief note to his wife, and four  
Of postcard passion to four pick-ups.

And the milk of doubt which starts each sentence  
"Darling . . .

Boyish, they bound with the village church,  
The courthouse square, the meadow streams,  
The sitting room, their world.  
The circumscription gave them strength;  
It wound upright their weakness.  
*Has Rosa had her calf? . . . John help you with  
the harvest?*

And bravado filtered through the sieve  
Of newspaper propaganda.  
The circle breaks:

*Although I only saw you twice,  
you are my ideal girl. I dream of you  
every night . . . wonder if you're mad  
you haven't answered my last three letters.  
It's over three months now—*

The pitiful veil,  
Held out by lonely hands, can never cover  
That fugitive flesh. Homespun. Rayon.

# P OCKET GUIDE FOR SERVICE MEN

"... are not molesters of women" the book says,  
Balancing in its hopefulness the rape  
That spirals in the eye when women pass.

The tower of morale, as plotted in  
A filing cabinet, skitters when  
The first wind of custom touches it,

And is a sheaf of blowing papers. We,  
Who value only sex and money, feed  
Our own disaster with decreed pretense.

The sailor, under the feathers and scarlet bloom  
Of flamboyants, invites the French girl  
To whoredom, if she does not know his tongue.

The soldier thinks all women prey for him,  
But prays within himself for one. The game  
Has spare reward, win or lose, but shame.

Not hemispheric in its cause, it effects  
A geographic contrast. Movie-fostered,  
Pulp-fed, dreaming of money and sex,

We live the lives of virile American Men—  
An emptiness of mirror-maze reflecting  
The wretched ritual of the pool room punk.

Here the pioneering spirit finds

Its last, debased residence, and blind  
To honor, honors nothing, so is honored.

It is too late to teach a fighter love  
When he must kill. It is too much to build  
Respect where none has been, or been owed.



# S TAGE, ACTORS, AUDIENCE

A smoky dawn, and on its dark the light  
Oozes mucously between conjunctive  
Grills of the corner butcher shop. The slim  
Shadow of iron rails radiates  
Like ribs of a fan across the ashy walk  
And drip of nocturnal gutters. Warm haunches  
Of animals lately slaughtered hang from rafters.  
Between these fleshy wings the butchers move  
Upon their intermittent stage with cleavers.

Two Javanese shuttle in the sun from docks  
On Moselle Bay to a ramp before a garage,  
With hobbled silent sheep astraddle their necks.  
They range the bodies ballet-style from tree  
To rusty springs and oil drums. Sheep-hearts—  
Docile population—their unconcerted  
Panting the frantic pulse of gray pistons  
In the amorphous engine of their fortune.  
Now a final one is dropped in place;  
And breathing a long breath, he shudders as if  
Of all he were the only one that knew.

Blue eyes, kindled under the fallow brow  
Of New Caledonian child, flicker on  
The wooly forms. Her bare feet move, spread  
Their toes, move in apoplectic dance.  
One finger enters her nostril, points and probes  
The nostril again, as if in this hypnosis  
It had freed dark intuition's secret.

Through a wincing mouth she whispers, "*Voyez  
Qu'ils me regardent!*" and distantly she leans  
About them, piercing toward their mole-skin eyes.  
Her feet shift here and there, her finger curls,  
And in her dance, she twines the front of her skirt.

## ROW FIVE, GRAVE TWO

Above the mangrove swamp, the cemetery,  
Spreading to the hillside's western berm,  
Twinkles a sea of flags that would confirm  
The clay-bound offered hope of these we bury

In a strange earth, far from home. Screening  
Foreign foliage will never shroud  
The common sky that floods with sun and cloud  
The fighter's final station. But turf is greening

As in their favorite parks and pastures. No burning  
Tree will drop a scarlet pall, no vine's  
Exotic leaf about each cross entwine:  
Sun-glint sod is home's closest returning.

In stony beds on Attu lie their brothers,  
In vaults of crowding jungle green are dressed.  
Mounds in Africa drift with desert unrest:  
The bloody coral crown, Tarawa, smothers

A thousand heroes' heads. From these inventoried  
Graves; from those who flag-wound slid beneath  
The waves, in blast of science vanished, wreath  
Of fire about each cell, in bones ungloried,

Alone, unknown, rest in mystic communion:  
From all, earth-girdling as the parallels,  
Is no vital knot of purpose to swell,  
Triumphant cord of their mortal union

Through a mad geography of divers  
Wars? We may have sealed in with these dead  
A purpose in their death. It may have fled  
Into the tomb, fearful of survivors'

Apathy when peace has come, and guarded  
Its memorial against the hold  
Of minds that memorize control and gold.  
Its home is here, among the graves, greenswarded.

Lacking sounder monuments, caretakers  
Will tend our hollow testimony, keep  
The grass trim, and let the pilgrim weep  
At "Row 5, Grave 2" in acres

Of intentions solemnly entombed. We suffer  
No caretaker for our spirit, miss  
No money spent on graves and archives. This  
Is all that we who bury you can offer:

A sign for country, a sign for love and pain,  
A sign for life. And if there be no more  
Than a neat plot and record, God rest you, for  
This is the ancient deathless tale again:

A million young hearts gone for nothing.

# A VENUE GEORGES CLEMENCEAU

(Nouméa)

At noon the stores, as in a Mississippi town  
Of childhood days, are closed, and sidewalks, shaded  
By a roof or balconies (that town again),  
Are porticos almost unpopulated.

The military guests have swarmed the new PX  
To eat ice cream, or buy brioche from neighbor  
*Jus de Fruit du Soldat*, alive with yellow paint,  
Screeching jive. Two MP's gloom on the corner.

When tropic sleep has gone, the shops lift up their blinds  
And shuttered cases, unashamed of empty  
Shelves or tawdry trinkets hallmarked Uncle Sam.  
The betel teeth of Tonkin women, tempting

Sailors with a bracelet, match their trousered dress.  
Across a fence of metal sheet, hibiscus  
Trees, warty-barked, dole their petals, limp  
Like melting butter pats. Inertia is mistress.

The French withdraw behind their mogrified facades  
Of livid window frames and swollen pillars.  
Kanakas, suited as for basketball, awake  
And yawn beside the lilies in Place d'Orly

And saunter, holding hands to ward a witch's charm.  
A mother—Javanese indentured labor—

Packs her child astride the hip in a slung sarong;  
Gold coins, hairpinned, solicit fortune's favor.

Where the street splits round the fountain's arid bowl  
The goddess tilts her stony horn of riches.  
The lip is choked; and from her loins lately flow  
Electric lines more fecund than her marble niches.

# NIGHT SPOT

Above them all she sees the languid hand—  
The air-shaped hand drooping as if to take  
A sweet-meat—idly closing over the instant  
Of their years the timeless bones of death.

The young men, laughing one more night, are gods  
Around the cocktail bar. To her they gleam  
In sentimental lights and music, flame  
Like Icarus against the murdering void.

Such radiance the tomb never shed  
Around a tenant as now, by its threat,  
Aureoles their manhood and the hunger  
Of her pantheogonic womb. But sterile

Her conception since her hunger feeds  
On symbols: through all the barren nights she winds  
Her shroud of thighs about the men who wait  
To lie in closer beds with barren Death;

For she is concubine with Death in war's  
Debasement. Her hysteric greed blasphemes  
The foggy shrine of life; these fighters pour  
Their blood libations for so little—so few.

Her arms, that in a calmer day would shame,  
Twine about the aviators' throats  
Like strangling scarves outblown from Kali's robes;  
And she and they forget . . . forget . . . forget.

# E COLE COMMUNALE—BOURAIL

Piggy-back, piggy back,  
In the prison yard.  
Tag, tag, fierce attack,  
Run behind the guard.

Recessed from class in which their treble monotone  
In unison "*les cygnes*" droned, "stretched out their necks  
Like serpents . . ." children leap at games, cry in their own  
Abandon, still untangled in the incestuous wreck

Of cultures. Where they play, by walls mouldering black,  
Sparsely grows the grass—no other thing, nor tree  
On hill behind. Here once walked a wretched pack  
Of women sent by France to prison across the sea.

(Back and forth, up and down,  
In the prison yard . . .  
Wait, weep, days will drown,  
Eyes and heart be scarred.)

Today they jump, run piggy-back like centaur colts  
In capers, on their heads olive soldier caps  
To key them to a war whose hidden threat revolts  
No more in them than dress. Some far mother, perhaps,

They think not of, paced this paddock while convict eyes,  
Drunk with near parole, through a crevice chose  
A colonial bride. Straw hats, round and ribboned, cries  
Of children, chasing games now fill the prison close.



*"Reviens! Reviens!"* laugh and call  
To players galloping by.  
Run, play, the blackened walls  
Don't yet shut out the sky.

At the bell clang, a last drink from the cistern fed  
By rain-spout in the eaves—stooping, spraddled, cup  
Of palms—and march to class: to read, with no more dread  
Than when they ran from It, "stretched serpent necks  
and *houp!*

*Dans le bassin des cygnes,"* in reedy chant, and dream  
Only swans of kindness. The yard is haunted now  
By sunshine, steeping from sod of time sorrows that seem  
To call "Come back!" as in a desperate game, and vow

The breath of innocence will drown an age of distress.  
*"Reviens!"* the children's cry floods over the walls of time  
"Come back, come back!" and washes with their artlessness  
The black of ancient wrongs—eternal anodyne:

Piggy-back, piggy-back,  
In the prison yard.



## OUTDOOR MOVIE — NOUMEA

The senile shadow of a vigorous time  
Lurks about the mountain slope.  
Whining for distant days  
We crowd the amphitheatre to gaze  
At shadow actors who will mime  
The modern satyr play.

Strophes from the mask of celluloid  
Curl with promise through the tiers.  
Cothurnus in high heels  
Tapdances to the cymbals, and ordeals  
Of love drench those lips enjoyed  
But never touched by ours.

Around our emptiness we draw the disguise  
Of movies. Oh, men at Thermopylae,  
This hero is a ghost.  
And all are lost upon the hillside, lost  
Beneath the dance of gigantic thighs  
Projected on our will.

Shadows, watching shadows, imitate,  
Drain their dwindling substance through  
Each others' pallid cores.  
Beyond the eastern range the great moon pours  
On screen of clouds, then breaks, great  
Cascade of longing, to

The desert of our dreams, breaks that screen  
Hiding the world of man from man,  
And probes the only real  
We know within ourselves. Its mirrors steal  
Us from the hypnotist. The lean  
Sinews knot and wake.

# WHERE NO BOMBS FELL . . .

Where no bombs fell, no conquerors marched,  
    No tanks rolled,  
    The old folk slept except  
For sinking dreams that cried, "My son, my son!"

Where no guns spat at citizens  
    Against a wall,  
    No laws forbade the mind,  
The children slept and dreamed no dreams of pain.

Where airplanes snarled no song of death  
    Across the moon  
    Young women neither slept  
Nor dreamed, but cried to the night, "O lover, husband!"

A kind of peace, a kind of war—  
    Anemic balance  
    Teetered by the selfish—  
Wherein the fear of what may come preserves

Alike the politician and  
    The nightmare of  
    The village architect.  
The trees are spared, but what is cured by war

Remote except in sacrifice?  
    No evil dies,  
    No good is born—  
Folly of monuments intact in stone.

# THE *L*AST LETTER

These forms she does not recognize.  
The china trees, the dusty street,  
The unhinged gate, melt in her eyes.  
*My son*, her lips repeat.

The letter cracks before her face.  
Official words of sympathy  
Signed by a stranger, can not replace  
The touch of humanity.

The curling mite, the child at the gate,  
The boy who helped to wash the clothes,  
The man who came from loving late  
And gay, is gone with those

Who die in battle. Neighbor friends  
Will murmur for her ease, but will  
Not question why his life should end  
By a stream in Bougainville.

Anonymous his deed, suppressed  
The sacrifice and pain. For no  
Community of honor rests  
In those who will it so.

He died for a land whose word was false,  
But his country, his work, his anguish. Yet  
The conflict in his heart exalts  
The motive and the debt.

His mother wipes her dark stained cheek.  
White folks' cooks better not be late.  
"Us niggers" move when patricians speak:  
Life and grief must wait.

# MUSIC IN THE REC HUT

The pen stops in a phrase of a letter home,  
The magazine drops in the sailor's lap,  
Its romance defeated. Talk and jokes become

Lost in inner moods, as music wraps  
The men in shining cords that wind  
Back overseas like hungry roots to sap

The strength of distant earth. It is behind  
Their eyes the music lives, the frieze  
Of Tin Pan tunes evolving scores designed

More human than all symphonies. The keys  
Fling out from the upright cataracts  
Of memory in every nimble piece.

Boogie-woogie, rhumba and waltz attack  
The forfeit past and rout out nights  
Of Negro piano in a dim café, and shacks

For barbecue across America, sights  
Of lonely childhood, dancing, kiss  
Of lips in tree-spread dark, the wife who died

Last week, good times and good friends. For this  
Is not the song of radio,  
Whose texture conjures merchandise, whose voice

Is advertising. Here the song is no  
Barren orchestration of guile,  
But is woven with the tones that flow

From each man into it: how the bile  
Of sorrow burned them, alchemy  
Of love and laughter gilded the body's vial.

Through gray smoke clouds the men stare. Each eye  
Entreats the curving walls to part  
On the giant swirl of Scorpio in the sky,

And the sting of night and starlight in every heart.



# CONDUCTED, ALL-EXPENSE TOUR

Committed to a worship of change,  
We travel only to buy the picturesque,  
To pump with ego-air the tire  
Absorbing the shock of life by electric devices.

The spoon with the Eiffel Tower handle  
Or Niagara Falls in its bowl, the string of pearls  
From Pacific Isles, the censer from temples  
In China, are ticket-stubs to line on a shelf

In the what-not of the mind. They gather  
Dust in the sweep of years, for travelers  
Like us grab the souvenir  
And not the understanding. So we never

Know what Paris meant, or incense  
In the shrine, or sea-worked necklaces,  
Or honeymoons, or even spoons;  
It is always time to go to newer places.

Now on a Cook's Tour far more grim  
Than ever travel bureau planned, men  
In vain search out the pregnant trinket  
Holding the heart of this bewildered trip.

There's no curio of the Coral Sea,  
But waves washing the light from a sailor's eyes.  
There's no Lover's Leap in the Solomons:  
It is a flaming falling air man.

What souvenirs we now collect—  
Strings of shells that burst the throat to blood,  
Bullets that scorn our raucous pride,  
Last sight of a world turned smoke and roar—

Line the mocking what-not where  
Our true relation to man parades its text.  
This blasted leg, this blackened brain,  
This blotted sight, this bric-a-brac of a dead

Bombed soldier . . . “We picked these up in New Guinea.”

# COUNTRYSIDE

The island is covered with washing.  
Every Kanaka shack has nailed a sign  
LAUNDRY to fence or tree; and hung on a line  
Between gum-oak and gairiac,

Khaki and olive trousers  
Flap out a sober Alabama-coon-jig. Where  
Are hidden the soldiers who have so much to wear?  
No camps are hereabout—

Mountain and woodland and cabins  
With simmering pots of clothes. The helpless streams,  
Bubbling milky with soap below scrubbing frames,  
Filter on bird's-nest fern roots.

Under a pentice of palm thatch,  
Loblolly women in swinging-bell skirts pursue  
The intimate washing of drawers and pressing of u-  
niforms. Bouncing of flesh never mind

The soldiers who stroll in for service,  
Their jeep at the gate below. They bewilder the hounds,  
Unschoolled in American dog-talk, with their sounds;  
Their French does no less to the natives.

Economy hurdles those dangers  
While kindness blinks and shrinks away in alarm.  
The children fan charcoal to keep the irons warm,  
And peep at the great grinning strangers.

# A VE, AD INFINITUM

The incidence of heroes has a definite relation to accidents.  
The factors are present. Given the quality of men  
The production of heroes would climb to millions  
On the assembly line of war—a cumbersome number.

The private in a foxhole, hungry and fevered but constant,  
Is not enshrined in publicity especially after  
The enemy's fire has found him. The nearest  
Of kin gets a form telegram. Such death has no sales value.

The pilot who downs a covey of airplanes is wined  
In Hollywood, displayed at the government's command,  
Paraded to spur the sale of war bonds  
To people who cherish heroes ready-made in the gross.

The reference is no longer to the character,  
Action's catapult of virtues, but  
To a single temporal point detached  
From daily meanness and bloated by the press into a poultice.

The trick is to know how to die—knowledge too often  
Put to use. The fertile circumstance  
Allowing distinction is denied  
Too many soldiers who got no lauding parade but died.

# THE PARADE

So rise from plotting death now and celebrate  
That earlier pause of war whose first parade moved  
Up New York's path to forgotten pastures through drift  
Of ticker tape and cast-off papers. Mark the date  
That ended wars and annually observe the proved  
Triumph when the diplomatic thuribles whiffed  
Pacific incense. Oh, we need this habit of drums  
If we are to hide the clamoring bones beneath costumes.

Derisive pageantry of hope long obsolete,  
The lines march by Nouméa's soldier monument.  
Do they salute the pompous officers, erect  
For many nations, with fresh wreathes about their feet,  
Or hail the dead whose names have shrunk to eloquent  
Incisions on the stone? The ceremonies project  
The wish, the order (lost through bred incompetence,  
Dichotomy of action and ideal), the sense.

This is the sense, though tentative, the ritual  
To screen the heretics: procession, flags and bands:  
The French and their Kanakas, Americans black and white,  
Australians and New Zealanders. . . . Visual  
Harmony of color, sex and country expands  
Across the route, till tanks and mobile guns invite  
The afterpiece of boy-and-girl-scouts blooming pride,  
Freshly wreathed in hope, the true parade inside.

The generals, the admirals, done with salutes,  
Now abandon the wreathes about the cenotaph.

The rites have been observed, martial protocol  
Is satisfied. The crowd breaks from its dream, recruits  
Its closer, tougher tenets, disperses with a laugh.  
The formal column cracks into divisible  
Commands, on back streets marching languorous and strangely  
    gay.  
And elders lead their children home to antiseptic play.

*Nouméa, November 1943*

# GARDEN OF WAR

Flower of fire, of instantaneous generation  
From seed of iron to powder bloom and spray  
Of piercing pollen fragments, your fulfillment  
Does not end with smoking petals in the sky.

That hard pollen, in its springing, germinates  
The seed of death in men whose charring entry  
Into earth sprouts as hard sorrow  
In some distant heart. Your cycle is not short

Nor natural in plants. Monster blossom, you  
Must breed in metamorphoses like  
The butterfly, feed on life and love  
Before their hate matures into the shell bud.

Parasite along your spreading poison branches,  
Rootless as an orchid, grows another  
Flower, desperate before your hunger,  
Fearless of its foreseen destiny. Men,

In this perverted botany, denied communion,  
Waiting to become the phase of death  
In your unnatural growth, must pour out love,  
Uprooted plants forcing a last withered bloom.

Perhaps they waste their tender words upon a dog  
Bounding careless on a beach-head; or  
Within a woman's letter fossilize  
The cotyledon of their love; or in night skies

And constellations penetrate a milky mirror.  
Here is lost already all but the touch  
Of some unchosen friend, the eyes of yes  
And living—monster of living dwarfing flower fire.



# 9 T'S ME, OH LORD, STANDING WITH A GUN

They crouch in the barge and the palms roll close,  
Green echo, high over sand, of waves,  
Of gray jelly-fish in smoke puffs whose  
Invisible sting is swift and leaden.

They crouch, tongue-dry, in the boat,  
And all the world is a puny beach-head:

World of clean-sliced hemispheres,  
Of latitudes of love and crime,  
Peopled with the mental smears  
Of medieval magic, thinning  
To a short horizon  
Under war's tremendous engine.

That glittering hierarchy down  
Through which the war blood streams, and great  
Einsteinian logistics, drown  
Upon this coast of conquest. Here is  
All of war, compact.  
It is simple. It is death-fear.

Undiscriminating death  
Appraises his approaching guests,  
Uniform in gear, beneath  
Which shiver bodies, black and white skinned,  
But uniform in value  
As currency of life. Their insight

Penetrates the island's pull,  
Magnetic jointure of here-after.  
Across the rail, the Negro full  
In death's face stares and blinks, beside him  
    Son of owners of slaves,  
Floating to a mortal hyphen, tongue-tied.

And the hyphen joins the puzzled past:  
The tired way down which they came,  
Twin exiles of historic trust—  
And fades in the jungle's blinding chaos.

    For on that final range  
Men sprawled, too patient in the wave lay,

Letting the gently anxious foam  
Entomb their scars in sand. No scales  
Enamel the minds of two from whom  
All memory soon may flee. The Negro  
    And the Southern man  
Reflect how inner bondage subtly

Links them to oppose what fought  
At home between them: tenant house  
Of jerried boards, and house it wrought  
Of moonbeam pillars; loom of clod-veined  
    Overalls that wove  
Tradition's silky gown. The drained blood

Mirrors doubly self and war,  
Retreating in the glasses to  
Extinction. The Negro fighting for  
A freedom fraud, the white for freedom  
    Mortgaged to mistrust,  
Fight to shield the bigot's long breed.

Palm surf roaring at their face,  
The Negro felt, not as on slaves,  
The white hand on his arm, and heard him:  
    "We can do it, can't we?"  
And some familiar thing was lost words.

The strakes grate on the shore, defy  
Horizon turned foreground of slaughter.  
*Whether I, the Negro, lie  
Here or return, by all these tokens,  
    Medals are for white men,  
Jim Crow life for me and my folk.*

Upon the coral shingle they leap  
And rush the smoking jungle. Round  
Their legs the salt-curles break and seep,  
Crumbling soon the mold of foot-prints.  
    Streaks of red, shell-studded,  
Blot in sand, in waves are washed mute.

# F E A R I S W H Y

Fear is why we fought and what we found:  
These industries of waste produce but fear  
    Whether in their bomber's sound  
Or in the film of desires they have wound  
About us. You will find no heart here.

The mind has been unmanned. It never appraised  
This toilet of the ages we have made  
    But called it super world. Shamefaced,  
Afraid of death by gadgets, we embraced  
The onanistic glories of gold braid.

We could not see behind the flag they waved.  
We did not know then the paradox  
    Of killing what you swore you saved.  
The military breed, emblem engraved  
With rutting, greed and murder, easily shocks.

Drop the pose, Gold Braid. A whole man  
Wants something more than a sure thing at three  
    Bucks a throw—more than  
Historic regulations to command  
Respect. A good heart is sound guarantee.

We found it out although an awful lot  
Of blood it took to show us. Love isn't sex,  
    Love isn't the movies, love is what  
We hid ashamed in human youth, forgot,  
Betrayed to guilt-edged sewer architects.

But their securities no longer leech:  
Without love there is always fear.

Behind war's inhumanity, each  
Of us, relieved of money's fear, could reach  
Again to human-kindness, could find it near.

In years of cringing peace its fresh imprint,  
Strange with life, will shine in the darkening night;  
And most will know how close they went  
To the simple secret of a man's intent.  
But we are dumb in the factory of fright.

The honest arm crooked round our shoulder will  
Endure, though we, afraid, may bury it deep.  
Its nobler paradox—to kill  
By rules taught us something of love—until  
A day of faith, must hide in the heart and sleep.

# THE *L*ONG REPRIEVE

In folding in the rocky cove it comes  
A bubbled syrup streaking green across  
And in with cloudy curls impetuous  
And urgent, volatile chrysanthemums

Along the ledges, out with sucking rush  
Resisting still indrawn upswelled and crested  
Descends in a long suspiration of pain unrested  
For a distant moon. The algal plush

Of shelving stone conforms its nap to tides.  
Molluscan colonies shape brooches here—  
Sea-slugs and snails and squid. And where each tier  
Is creviced rolls the bloated worm with hide

Of black chenille and innards milky whorled.  
And black and burry urchins, brain of coral,  
Coral skeleton, suffuse with floral  
Apathy their wave-worried world.

Under the undulant flux these habitants  
Are animated from paralysis  
As if they strove at anchors. Oh, but this  
Is light's illusion: this, the mortal trance

Of men in war, intermediate  
The glare of battle's fusion pyre and lasting  
Glow of passion's selfish purpose. A wasting  
Cove shuts in our holuthurian state.

Across the hungry shoals the dead moon sweeps  
The surfs of memory (rich ocean-source  
Of life) in dolloping foam to lay their force  
On stony growth, refract its torpid deeps.

So from the westward tides the spindrift piles  
On shore. It could be violet leaves—far stain  
Of seaweed—cool and morning wet again  
Around a child's wrist, slivering, while

His fingers search the flower's crisp stem  
And raise a smell of wood and earth. That garden,  
Long ago and occult, with its warden  
Hedge and weeping trees presides on dim

Reality. Its monstrous gothic house  
Is surely veined with secret doors, with stairs  
As dark as gulfs. But from the unaware  
Of violets the child cannot arouse.

Then spume of spring breaks on familiar trees,  
Whose black arms held the sorrow of winter nights,  
Now feathered in fearless youth; on clouds and kites  
And reaching things of green, on crocuses,

On bottom pastures buttoned with clover, on creeks  
Where crawfish pile their doors, on nests new-made  
And roadside thickets of plum, on red thorn, blade  
Of jonquil, roots reborn—it spills and breaks.

Now sways upon the sea a kelp of flats  
In brownstone fronts and traffic's solitude,  
Where phosphorus of love adorns the crude  
And snaky night with stars. It was in that

Mysterious light those common things could blaze  
Like visionary gear: the brush that strands  
Her tangled hair, a book in shell-thin hands,  
The window herbs, a shoe. They'll not always

Beget a luster: nor her touch, transcending  
The time—such time he knows, while his senses  
Feed but bleed his heart. Their best pretenses  
Could not stifle the seed of early ending.

The weave of sun-shot waves is web more cold  
Than firelight at the family hearth where sleep  
The old forgiven manners that knit him deep  
And docile in their unaccountable hold:

The street lamp winks through elms, and here are rocking  
Chairs on a small-town porch, the men's cigar  
Smoke trailing gray in moonlight, tales of far  
Childhood and youth heard in childhood mocking

Far from now—picnics, excursions through  
Ravines, partridge hunts in burnt-leaf air,  
Adventures in haunted words, jack-o-lanterns' glare  
At dusk. —Such picayune foundations do

Not demonstrate their magnetism. These,  
A native matter and nativity,  
Caught to hearth, shaped whatever he  
Before that altar is. Though double distances

From home he flee, the father's tempered sense,  
The mother's yield of beauty's hunger, weight  
The Janus course with their precipitate—  
An apotheosis of residence.



From that enveloping design still pours  
The stream of buried life past all the shining  
Islands—root of home, childhood's catkin, twining  
Love—in tireless tides on inner shores.

From these tremendous depths creatures crawled  
When none but wind and water owned a speech.  
From these tides again the vernal reach  
Of generation breaks on the stagnant mold.

The great waters fold and roll as fresh  
As in their distant first impulse. Each wave,  
Intimate in origins, bursts grave  
And white with comet-tails and throws a mesh

Around the severed heart. Such is the flood  
Whose ebbing bears anew the life curtailed  
By war, insistent on the values failed.  
Soon leave this temporary fossil in its mud,

Oh currents rushing through these caverns, leave  
The wrack on selvedge drying, leave the sand  
Dollar on the sand. The living land  
Is still our soil, and this our long reprieve.

### III

*But someone leaves, someone is left, endures  
The jungle of characters, the jig-saw scenes,  
The always endings, always overtures.*



# SAILING

The bruised shore moves slowly off our port.  
A sulphurous snake from the nickel plant  
Rides the sky across the harbor.  
Sprawling Ile Nou, where penal barracks rot  
Among nests of Quonset huts,  
Recedes in unreality. Interior mountains,  
Misted blue in the early sun,  
Rise behind the fingered peninsula.  
In the buzzing of their forests I have sat  
And heard an unseen bird cry once.

Bruised island of bruised people,  
New Caledonia is now a place in wonder.  
Beyond the ship's rail a cyclorama reels the landmarks.  
Far, there, on Anse Vata beach, where green  
Lapping calms the mind, hospital  
Eyes are dreaming on our sea-splashed hull.  
Ouen Toro's summit signals with a flashing light.  
Mont D'Or, a chocolate loaf  
That we once set to climb,  
Slides up to guard the Bay of Boulari.  
And in the center cove St. Louis Mission  
Hovers over rice and taro fields.  
In its flower-ridden native village  
The Kanaka carving a cross gave us  
Papayas and bananas. "*C'est un don,*"  
He said and asked *un dollar* for the communal fund.

Uneasy people, masked in a riddled past . . .  
In Thio, under the broad trees I walked,

In Canala, La Foa and Bourail.  
Between the apricot walls of Nouméa  
So many times I went, watching the faces  
Of Kanaka, Tonkinese, Javanese and French,  
But never was close to the center.  
War had put armies in residence  
Between my question and your truth.  
In town you profiteered on cheap gewgaws;  
But on a lonely mountain pass, road workers  
Showered our car with local oranges . . .  
Uneasy people, stooge of foreign interest,  
A nightmare lies in your siesta.

At Madame Collard's farmhouse dinners  
(How luxurious an omelet was!)  
Were served in Javanese tranquility  
By Sará. "Ah," she cried,  
"*Je suis mariée* . . . Foo! Crazee boy!"  
Along the reef, almost at vanishing point,  
Breakers roll a variant white line.  
Indigo sparkle rounds the sandy, shrubby pastille  
That bases the iron cylinder of Amedée Light.  
Under that ledge of palms the town called Plum  
Turned out to be a roadside stand  
With good tea and cucumber sandwiches.  
And now, the mouth of Rivière des Pirogues  
Where, beyond the saw-mill  
A clear swimming hole swept below  
A diving board in a fork of pandanus.  
That hill across, the map marked "Opals here"  
But there was no bridge or road.  
Prony lies beyond.  
The tumbling canyon above Yaté  
Does not sluice the electric turbines. . . .

So much I saw, so much attempted,  
But where was your motive heart?  
Not to be found in recollection and not offered  
In the carnival of contact. The pageant has passed  
And left the scene unlighted and strange.  
Now, for me, it will blur behind  
The stunted trees and space. But for you,  
Uneasy, bruised people—for you—?

Through Woodin Passage the gray ship turns,  
And the mottled hills hang close:  
Red slashes, yellow washes scar the steep slag,  
Relics of mineral search.  
The narrow channel curls behind;  
Our radar sweeps the pie-pan sea.  
Here is the break in the ring of coral,  
And the gray hills will drown in the gray tides.  
The pilot debarks in a trailing boat.  
Down from the yard-arm flutters How.

# A L W A Y S O V E R T U R E S

Always are endings, always overtures—  
Scenario of nonsense, acts of dismay,  
The quick, the slow curtain, the interlude—  
A macaronic, tragi-comic play.

Turbid cities of our homeland lighted  
Magic faces over cocktail bars—  
Fading faces, downy sacrifices  
To defenders, giddiness of wars.

The sudden friends, now old ones are so scattered,  
Dwindle with the footlights in the trough.  
You saw what could have been (essential magnet)  
If rules of battle gave you time enough.

Austral islands, school-book islands, press  
Their jungles round each camp, press to blind  
The weeding eye. You have them now, just as  
You did—the tangled faces far behind.

Man talk with your friends, sweettalk your girls,  
But someone leaves, someone is left, endures  
The jungle of characters, the jig-saw scenes,  
The always endings, always overtures.

# NIGHT AT SEA

Yellow lingers behind the gray ambush  
Of clouds that squat along the horizon.  
The hidden sun inscribes on their curls a rune  
Of Persian characters in neon.

Overhead the splay of light, withdrawing  
Slowly on the axis, departs  
A darkening abyss where red Antares  
Soon will pulse the Scorpion's heart.

Venus burns in Virgo, anomaly  
So bright she sears a flecking path  
Across the sea. The ship, between two deeps,  
Pursues its solitary track.

Of all that gulf of stars, only here  
Is conscious life; and how alone  
On this secretive water the vessel steers  
Its wake, blacked-out and tossing and gone.

On deck, the pudgy words of selfish warriors  
Plan to breed monopolies of cash.  
Veterans of no battles hug their power.  
(Death's pupils never live to teach.)

Knotted in their nets, the stars draw tight,  
But man is light-years from his kind.  
The black mast rocks against the empty night,  
Ponderously stabbing the silent blind.



## C O N C E R T   A T   S E A

Although the ship's bell marks the time, it is  
Not music's time: a squad of sailors hammer  
Paint from rusting plates in rippling beats;  
The ventilators pour out noisy breath;  
The public address calls, "Sweepers, man your brooms";

Each side, the bow-wake hisses like the fall  
Of silver chains: But somewhere there is music  
Edging through the sound of discipline  
And cleanliness. That was Debussy's "Faun,"  
Lost, though amplified, in modern life.

And now the Rose leaps through the window Weber  
Little dreamed of; but our necessary  
Noise of passage withers him to naught.  
The boudoir is a drawing room; the garret  
Hygienic where the chilly artist coughed.

The classic concept lives in dynamos,  
And incantation will not charm it thence.  
And yet, recall, there was a softer view,  
The somersault of hearts, the mind's abeyance,  
Sensuous webs—that, too, has been transformed.

In Paris cafés where golden gas-light steeped  
The daring waxen bosoms with incandescence  
The waiters now serve female lecturers.  
Romance and wickedness cohabit sweetly  
In those good bodies who yesterday

Kept their definitions strict and thrilling.  
The faun? Perhaps that flying fish that skips  
The slicing bow. The Invitation has been  
Refused; the Rose, in truth, is spectre now.  
Our course is secret; it is a time of war.

# DIVIDENDS

We are bringing back some cancelled notes.  
We have them here on the deck, in the bright sun,  
With aluminum smears of ocean writhing under the heated  
clouds.

This is a sort of report to the stockholders.  
Each figure on the diagram represents one thousand.

Item: a sailor, leg cut off.  
Credit: votes for irresponsible politicians.  
Item: a soldier, right arm missing.  
Credit: copy and blurbs for a depraved press.  
Item: a marine, face gone.  
Credit: . . . . .

But am I boring you? You probably want  
To clip your coupons and arrange a merger . . .  
Madame, how was I to know that one  
Of them was your son? They are everybody's sons.  
Sir, you might consider it a buy on margin—  
A sort of side bet. You won on the larger  
Investment, didn't you? . . . Am I cruel? Bitter?  
Rolling here on the furnace sea with men  
Who came back from Saipan and Guam, who still can grin,  
Seeing the ship point eastward through the burning  
Haze? Cruel? To this man who never will cross  
His legs again, to this one slowly learning  
To smoke and eat with his left hand, cruel to those  
Who faced what did this and are not here?  
Or cruel to your civilian heart? Look.

No, no. Come look. Look at these men—these boys.  
From their faces you could imagine they  
Had kicked a goal in a freshman game.  
But in the night, in dark, in silence,  
What do their eyes see that were opened by fire,  
What do they think that will not let them sleep?

This is the return on your investment,  
The “good buy” the Brokers told you about.  
It was so cheap; yours for only sloth  
And the glorification of ignorance.  
“Thank God, I’m just an ordinary man,”  
You always said, and you scorned everything but money.  
When you should have thought, you went to sleep.  
When you should have read, you took the comic strip.  
When you had to vote, you were in the movies.  
When you should have acted a citizen, you acted a fool in a  
    night club.  
Well, death is ordinary, too.

How you have deceived your children! Yes,  
These, on this ship coming home to your arms,  
Where you hope to cure them with sweets  
Of your pretty frightened view of America they fought to  
    preserve.

You dare not let them think of America they fought to build,  
For your investment is at stake. You might lose  
Something. You need not bother about those bunks below—  
That one where a skull is bandaged down to the mouth,  
Around the chin a soft yellow down he would have shaved  
Except he didn’t quite make it back home.

Think of yourself and of them, and judge  
How your investment has paid.  
These loans are cancelled forever.

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